



US009843579B2

(12) **United States Patent**  
**Zou et al.**

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,843,579 B2**  
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Dec. 12, 2017**

(54) **DYNAMICALLY GENERATED SSID**

*H04W 76/021* (2013.01); *H04W 12/06*  
(2013.01); *H04W 24/02* (2013.01); *H04W*  
*88/08* (2013.01)

(71) Applicant: **Dell Software Inc.**, Round Rock, TX  
(US)

(72) Inventors: **Guo Hui Zou**, Shanghai (CN); **Zhong Chen**, San Jose, CA (US); **Zhuangzhi Duo**, Fremont, CA (US); **Xiaodong Lin**, Shanghai (CN)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC ..... *H04L 63/0869*; *H04L 63/0421*; *H04L*  
*12/4625*; *H04W 76/021*; *H04W 88/08*;  
*H04W 12/06*; *H04W 12/08*

USPC ..... 726/6  
See application file for complete search history.

(73) Assignee: **SONICWALL INC.**, Santa Clara, CA  
(US)

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

(\*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 100 days.

8,032,117 B2 \* 10/2011 Ross ..... *H04L 63/104*  
*455/410*  
2005/0195781 A1 \* 9/2005 Ikeda ..... *H04W 48/12*  
*370/338*  
2007/0159997 A1 \* 7/2007 Tsai ..... *H04W 12/04*  
*370/328*  
2014/0337633 A1 \* 11/2014 Yang ..... *H04W 12/08*  
*713/178*

(21) Appl. No.: **14/603,208**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 22, 2015**

\* cited by examiner

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2016/0219050 A1 Jul. 28, 2016

*Primary Examiner* — Tu Nguyen

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Polsinelli LLP

(51) **Int. Cl.**

*H04L 29/06* (2006.01)  
*H04W 12/08* (2009.01)  
*H04W 76/02* (2009.01)  
*H04W 48/12* (2009.01)  
*H04W 12/04* (2009.01)  
*H04W 12/06* (2009.01)  
*H04W 88/08* (2009.01)  
*H04W 24/02* (2009.01)

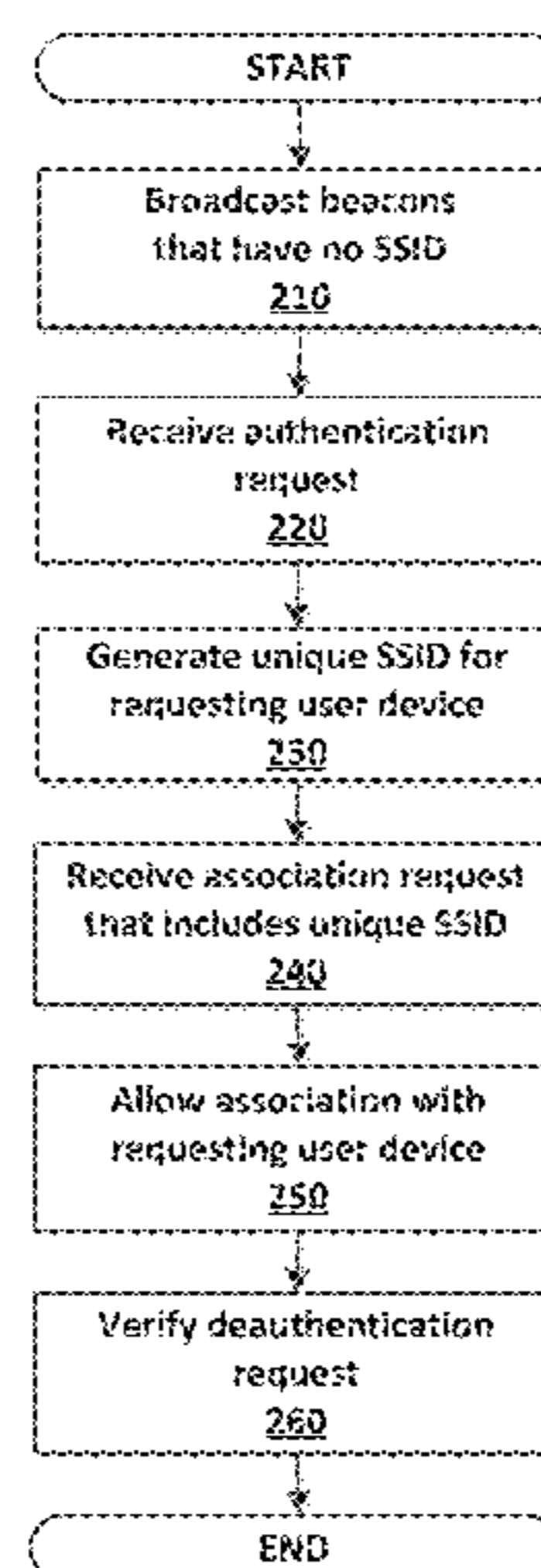
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A plurality of beacons that do not include any service set identifiers may be broadcast from an access point. A request concerning association with the access point may be sent wirelessly from a user device and received at the access point. A unique service set identifier (SSID) for the requesting user device may be generated, and information regarding the unique SSID may be transmitted to the requesting user device. A subsequent association request from the requesting user device may include the unique SSID.

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ..... *H04L 63/0869* (2013.01); *H04L 63/0876*  
(2013.01); *H04W 12/04* (2013.01); *H04W*  
*12/08* (2013.01); *H04W 48/12* (2013.01);

**19 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets**



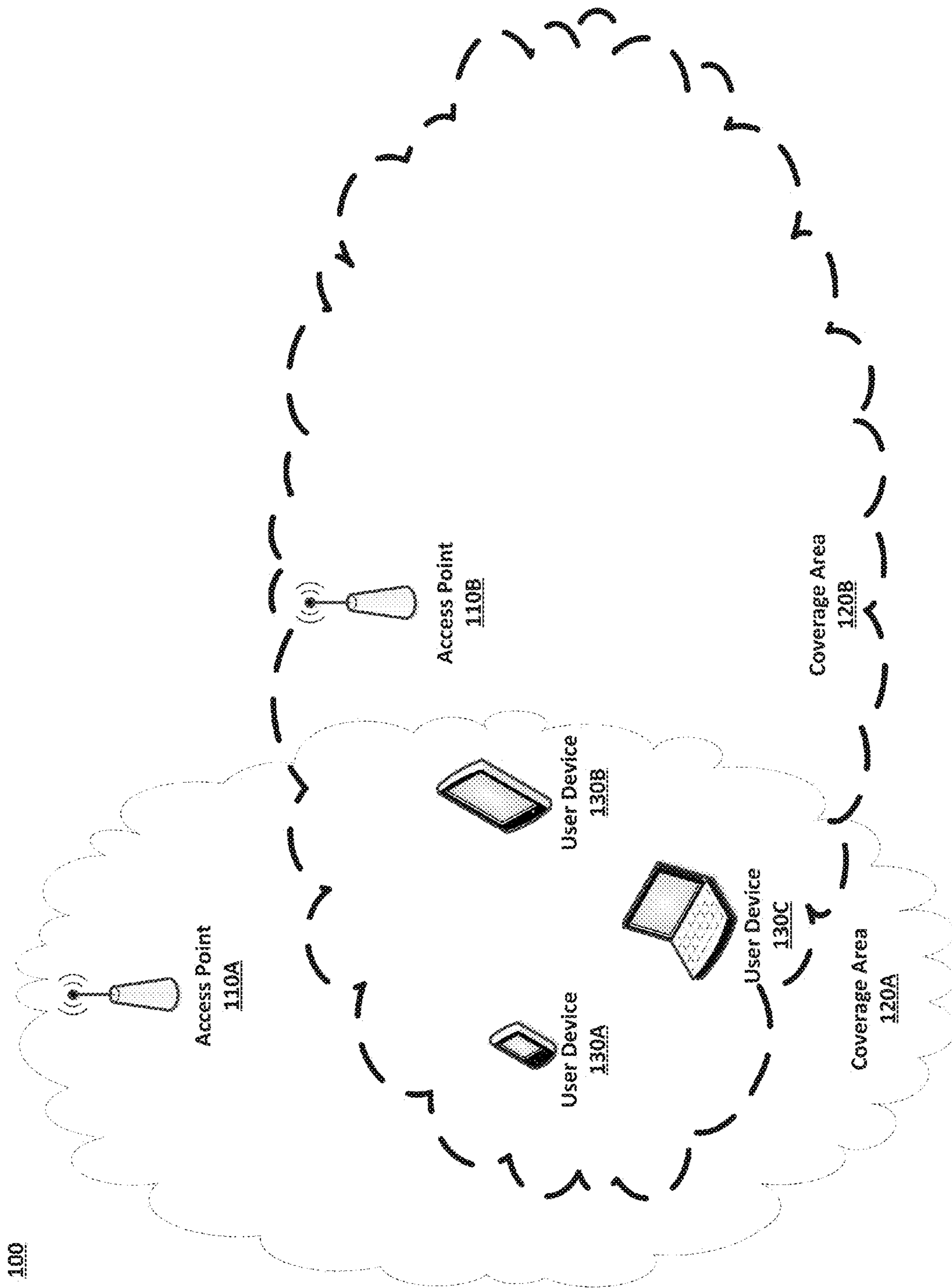


FIGURE 1

200

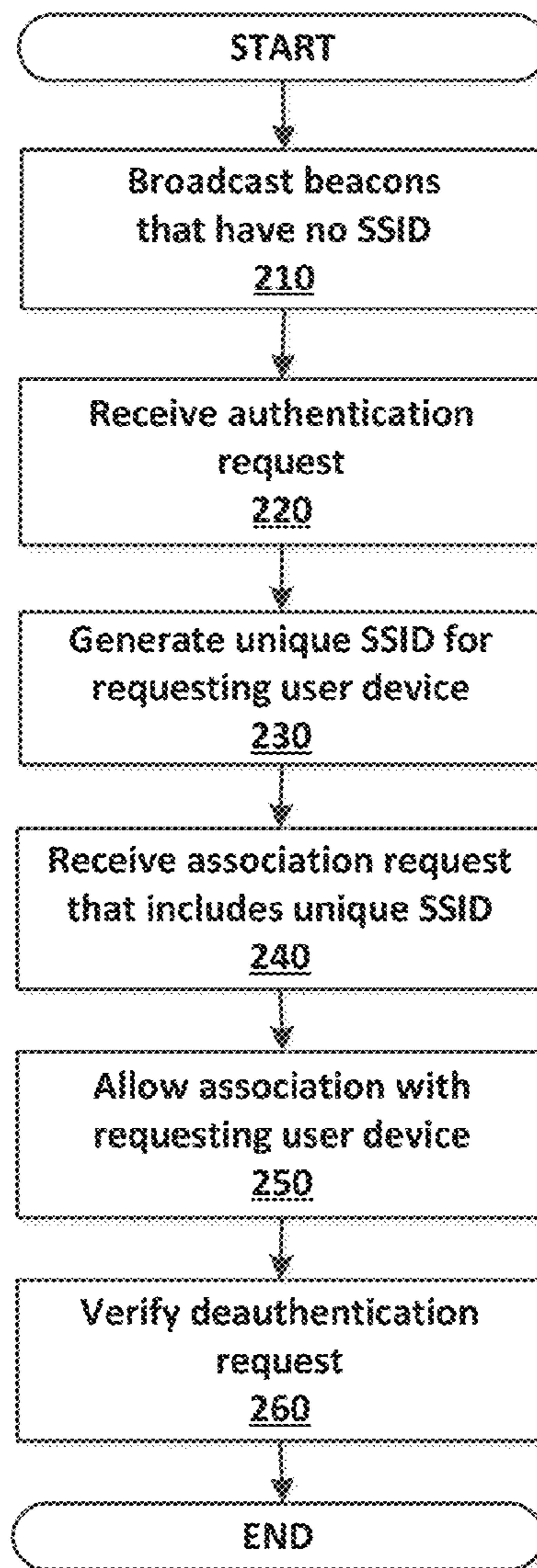


FIGURE 2

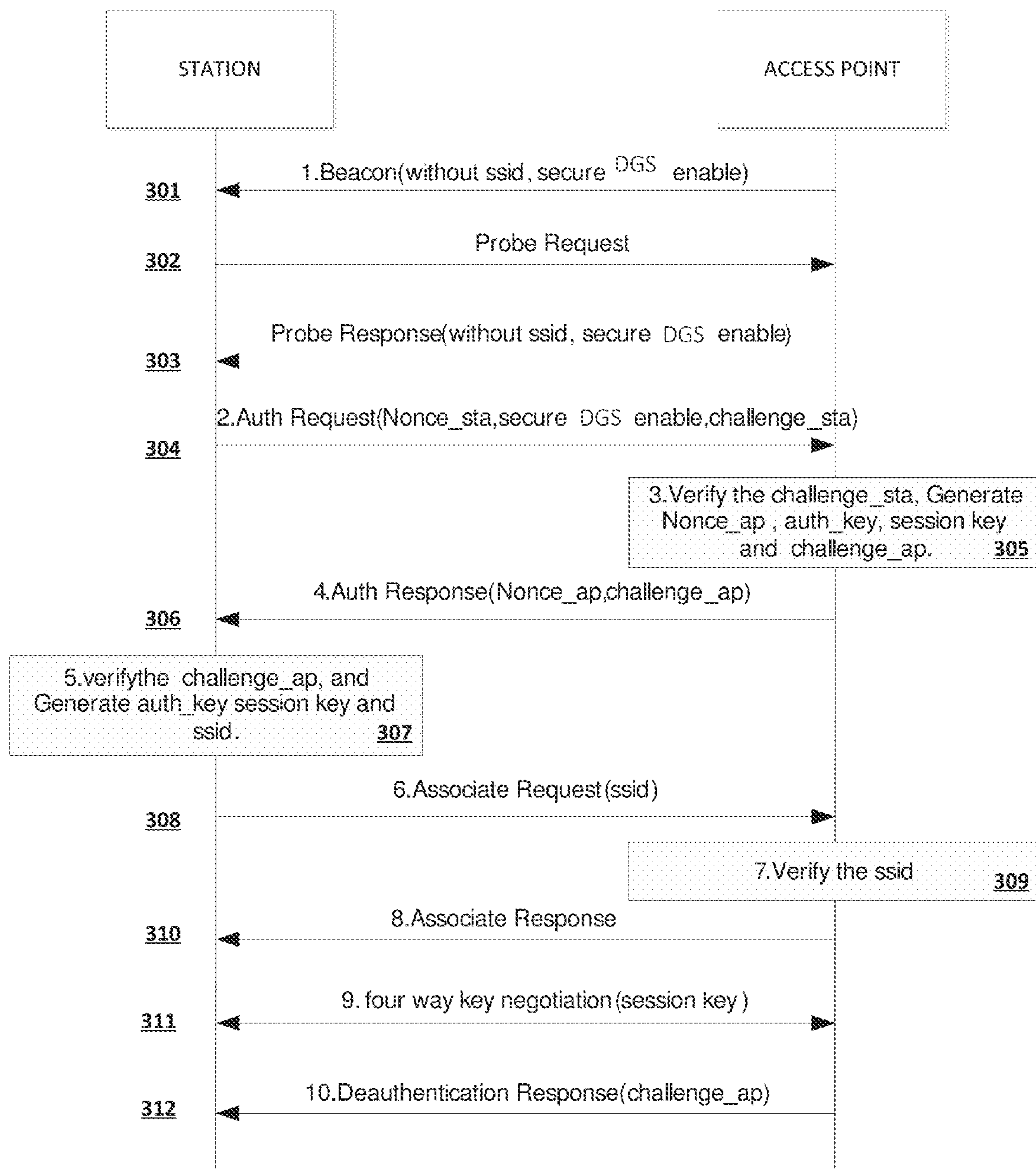


FIGURE 3A

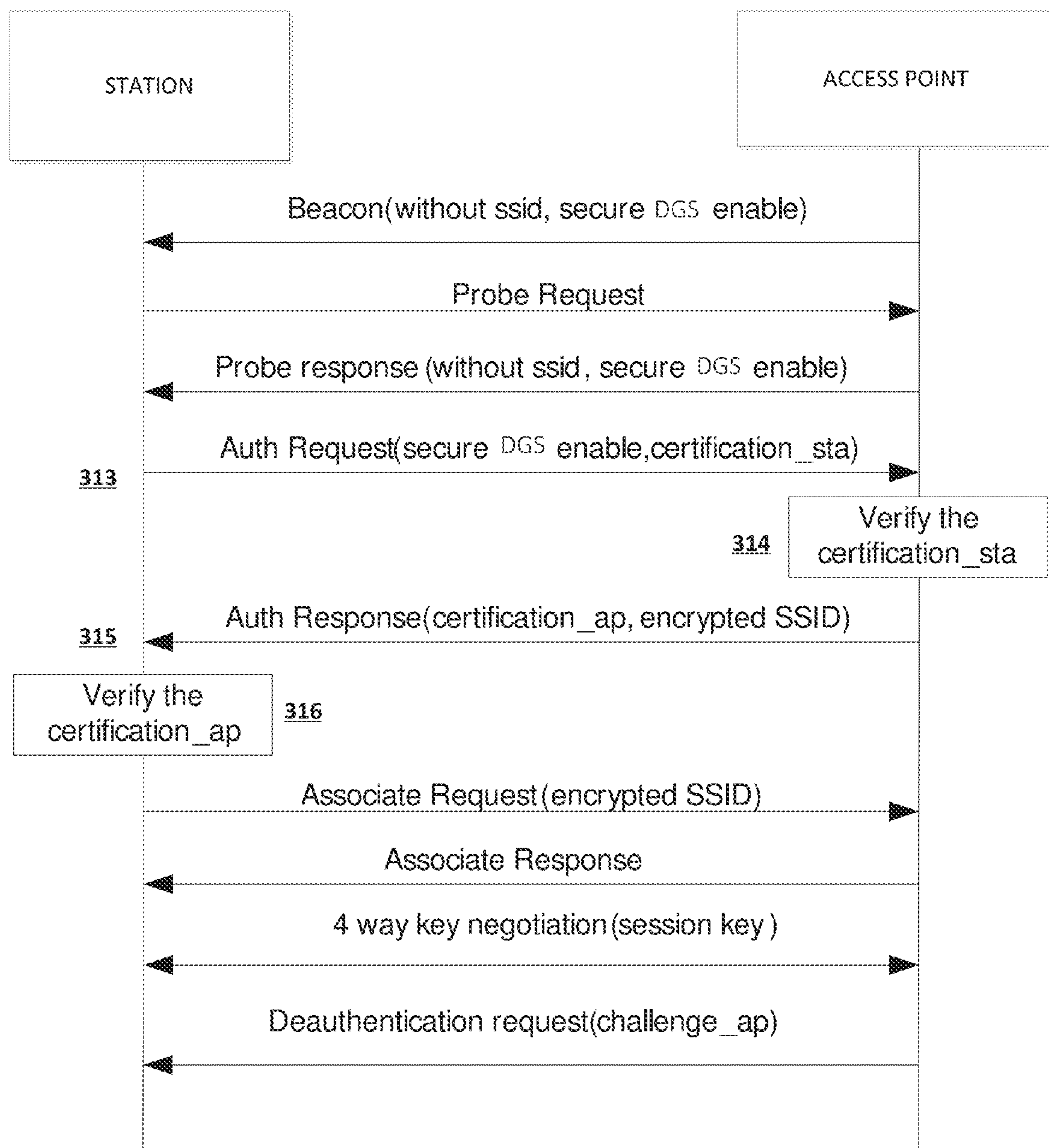


FIGURE 3B

**DYNAMICALLY GENERATED SSID**

## BACKGROUND

## 1. Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to service set identifiers (SSIDs). More specifically, the present invention relates to dynamically generated SSIDs.

## 2. Description of the Related Art

Presently available computer networking systems may use wireless standards promulgated by such standards-setting organizations as the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). Such standards may include various specifications and protocols (e.g., 802.11) for implementing wireless communications among computing devices.

An exemplary wireless communication network may include one or more access points (including wired and wireless access points) and wireless communication devices. Each access point may be identified by a service set identifier (SSID), which may serve as a unique name for the wireless communication network served by the access point. Such SSID may be broadcast throughout the coverage area of the respective access point. As such, a user device that is capable of wireless communication and located within a coverage area of the access point may detect such broadcasts and request to the join its associated wireless communication network.

Because the SSID does not change in presently available computer networking system, the wireless communication network may be vulnerable to scanning and attack by malicious parties. For example, an attacker may set up another access point that spoofs the same SSID, which may then be broadcast within the same coverage area, but with increased transmit power. As such, user devices attempting to connect to the wireless communication network may be fooled into connecting to the attacker access point.

In addition, an attacker may perpetrate a distributed denial of service (DDOS) attack by spoofing management frames, including packets that include a deauthentication request. Such a spoofed deauthentication request may result in an access point mistakenly deauthenticating devices currently connected to or otherwise associated with that access point. In that regard, service to such devices may be disrupted, as the access point would have terminated the association over which service would have been provided.

One way the problem has been addressed in the past has been by hiding the SSID and preventing the SSID from being broadcast. Such a technique may also be referred to as network cloaking. As such, the wireless device must have previously obtained the SSID and specifically submit a request with that SSID in order to join the wireless communication network. While hiding the SSID may present an obstacle to attackers, such a tactic is not effective against a determined attack, attackers with packet sniffing capabilities, or where the SSID may be known to devices that may themselves be vulnerable to attack.

There is, therefore, a need in the art for improved systems and methods for securing wireless communication networks that use SSIDs.

## SUMMARY OF THE CLAIMED INVENTION

Embodiments of the present invention include systems and methods for providing dynamically generated SSIDs. A plurality of beacons that do not include any SSIDs may be broadcast from an access point. A request concerning association with the access point may be sent wirelessly from a

user device and received at the access point. A unique service set identifier (SSID) for the requesting user device may be generated, and information regarding the unique SSID may be transmitted to the requesting user device. A subsequent association request from the requesting user device may include the unique SSID.

Additional embodiments of the present invention may include methods for providing dynamically generated SSIDs. Such methods for dynamically generating service set identifiers may include broadcasting a plurality of beacons that do not include any service set identifiers from an access point, receiving an authentication request sent wirelessly from a user device concerning association with the access point, executing instructions to generate a unique service set identifier (SSID) to the requesting user device, and transmitting information regarding the unique SSID to the requesting user device, wherein a subsequent association request from the requesting user device includes the unique SSID.

Further embodiments of the present invention may include apparatuses for dynamically generating service set identifiers. Such apparatuses for dynamically generating service set identifiers may include an antenna that broadcasts a plurality of beacons from an access point, wherein the beacons do not include any service set identifiers and that receives a request sent wirelessly from a user device, the request concerning association with the access point. The apparatuses may further include a processor that executes instructions stored in memory, wherein execution of the instructions by the processor generates a unique service set identifier (SSID) for the requesting user device. The antenna may further transmit information regarding the unique SSID to the requesting user device, wherein a subsequent association request from the requesting user device includes the unique SSID.

Various embodiments of the present invention may further include non-transitory computer-readable storage media, having embodied thereon a program executable by a processor to perform methods for providing dynamically generated SSIDs as described herein.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

FIG. 1 illustrates a network environment in which an exemplary system for providing dynamically generated SSIDs may be implemented.

FIG. 2 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary method for providing dynamically generated SSIDs.

FIG. 3A is a diagram illustrating exemplary exchanges that may occur in a system for providing dynamically generated SSIDs.

FIG. 3B is a diagram illustrating alternative exchanges that may occur in a system for providing dynamically generated SSIDs.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Embodiments of the present invention allow for systems and methods of providing dynamically generated SSIDs. A plurality of beacons that do not include any SSIDs may be broadcast from an access point. A request concerning association with the access point may be sent wirelessly from a user device and received at the access point. A unique service set identifier (SSID) for the requesting user device may be generated, and information regarding the unique SSID may be transmitted to the requesting user device. A

subsequent association request from the requesting user device may include the unique SSID.

FIG. 1 illustrates a network environment **100** in which an exemplary system for providing dynamically generated SSIDs may be implemented. Network environment **100** may include one or more access points **110A-B** each with a corresponding coverage area **120A-B**, and one or more user devices **130A-C**. As illustrated, the user devices **130A-C** may all be within the respective coverage areas of access point **110A** (e.g., coverage area **120A**) and access point **110B** (e.g., coverage area **120B**).

Access point **110A-B** may be associated with or part of a router and may generally include one or more antennas, radios, and batteries or other power source. In that regard, access points **110A-B** may be any device known in the art for allowing wireless user devices to connect to a wired network via a wireless communication network. Such a wireless communication network may be a local, proprietary network (e.g., an intranet) and/or may be a part of a larger wide-area network. The communications network may be a local area network (LAN), which may be communicatively coupled to a wide area network (WAN) such as the Internet. The Internet is a broad network of interconnected computers and servers allowing for the transmission and exchange of Internet Protocol (IP) data between users connected through a network service provider. Examples of network service providers are the public switched telephone network, a cable service provider, a provider of digital subscriber line (DSL) services, or a satellite service provider.

Coverage areas **120A-B** are each associated with a respective access point **110A-B** and represent the geographic area services by the respective access point **110A-B**. The characteristics of a coverage area **110A** (e.g., size, shape) may depend on the associated access point **110A** and its antenna configuration, power, and other components.

Users may use any number of different electronic user devices **130A-C**, such as general purpose computers, mobile phones, smartphones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), portable computing devices (e.g., laptop, netbook, tablets), desktop computing devices, handheld computing device, or any other type of computing device capable of communicating over a wireless communication network. User devices **130A-C** may also be configured to access data from other storage media, such as memory cards or disk drives as may be appropriate in the case of downloaded services. User device **130A-C** may include standard hardware computing components such as network and media interfaces, non-transitory computer-readable storage (memory), and processors for executing instructions that may be stored in memory.

In the prior art, access point **110A** would broadcast its SSID throughout coverage area **120A**, thereby allowing user devices **130A-C** to discover and associate with access point **110A**. Such a prior art system would be vulnerable, however, if an attacker were to scan for the SSID of access point **110A**. Such attacker may then be able to set up another access point **110B** that spoofs the SSID in beacons broadcast increased transmit power throughout its respective coverage area **120B**. User devices **130A-C** may thereafter try to associate with access point **110B**, thereby breaking the association with access point **110A**. Likewise, deauthentication requests with spoofed SSIDs may be result in broken links between the servicing access point **110A** and the serviced user devices **130A-C**.

In embodiments of the present invention, however, no SSID would be included in beacons sent from access point **110A** throughout its respective coverage area **120A**. Rather,

the user device **130A** may respond to the beacon by sending an authentication request to access point **110A**, which may then dynamically generate a unique SSID for the user device **130A**. In that regard, another user device **130B** providing different information to the access point **110A** would also receive a dynamically generated SSID that is different, as well as unique to the other user device **130B**.

FIG. 2 illustrates a method **200** for providing dynamically generated SSIDs. The method **200** of FIG. 2 may be embodied as executable instructions in a non-transitory computer readable storage medium including but not limited to a CD, DVD, or non-volatile memory such as a hard drive. The instructions of the storage medium may be executed by a processor (or processors) to cause various hardware components of a computing device hosting or otherwise accessing the storage medium to effectuate the method. The steps identified in FIG. 2 (and the order thereof) are exemplary and may include various alternatives, equivalents, or derivations thereof including but not limited to the order of execution of the same.

In method **200** of FIG. 2, a plurality of beacons that do not include any service set identifiers may be broadcast from an access point. An authentication request concerning association with the access point may be sent wirelessly from a user device and received at the access point. A unique service set identifier (SSID) for the requesting user device may be generated, and information regarding the unique SSID may be transmitted to the requesting user device. A subsequent association request from the requesting user device may include the unique SSID. During the time period when the requesting user device is associated with the access point, any deauthentication requests would be verified prior to disassociation.

In step **210**, access point **110A** may broadcast beacons that have no SSID. Like prior art beacons, such beacons may advertise the availability of the access point **110A** to service user devices **130** in the coverage area. For example, such beacons may advertise a secure wireless communication network provided by access point **110A** and that would allow user devices **130** to access the Internet. Other than failing to make public the SSID of access point **110A**, such beacons may be in other respects similar to those broadcast by prior art access points.

In step **220**, an authentication request from a user device **130A** may be received by access point **110A**. Such an authentication request may be sent by a user device **130A** that wishes to associate with access point **110A** and thereby access the secure wireless communication network provided by the same. The authentication request may include various information (e.g., MAC address) regarding the requesting user device **130A**. Such an authentication request may be responsive to a probe response that may carry a flag indicating that the access point uses dynamic SSID generation in authentication.

Following receipt of the authentication request from the requesting user device **130A**, the access point **110A** and the requesting user device **130A** may engage in mutual authentication. In step **230**, a unique SSID (and session key) is generated for the requesting user device **130A**. Such a unique SSID may be based on a variety of bases that may be random and/or specific to the requesting user device **130A**. Such bases may include any combination of MAC address of the requesting user device **130A**, random bits (e.g., numbers, characters), a pre-shared secret (e.g., between access point **110A** and requesting user device **130A**), and

vendor-specific information. One or more bases of the SSID may be further subject to algorithms, hash functions, etc., as part of generating the SSID.

In step 240, the requesting user device 130A may send an association request containing the unique SSID to the access point 110A. Because the unique SSID associated with the requesting user device 130A is based on information that may be random or specific to that requesting user device 130A, no other devices would be able to determine or generate the same SSID (e.g., via packet sniffing). In that regard, both the access point 110A and the requesting user device 130A may use exchanged information (e.g., random or specific to requesting user device 130A) to generate the unique SSID that is to be used in associating the two devices. Because random information may be used, the same requesting user device 130A may be associated with different SSIDs in different sessions with the access point 110A. Likewise, another user device 130B that may wish to associate or that is associated with the access point 110A has its own unique SSID (e.g., based on random or specific information regarding user device 130B) that had been dynamically generated for its current session with the access point 110A.

In step 250, the access point 110A may then verify whether the SSID included in the association request matches the unique SSID generated in step 230 and associated with the requesting user device 130A. If so, the association request may be granted, and the access point 110A may begin providing service to the requesting user device 130A. In that regard, a four-way key negotiation may occur to generate a master key (e.g., based on a session key or pre-shared secret) thereby effecting the association. If the SSID in the association request is determined not to match the unique SSID associated with the requesting user device, the association request may be denied, and the requesting user device 130A is denied services from the access point 110A.

In step 260, a deauthentication request may be received indicating that the requesting user device 130A wishes to terminate communications with the access point 110A. Management frames, which include deauthentication requests, are generally unencrypted and/or unauthenticated in the prior art. In embodiments of the present invention, however, such deauthentication requests may be verified before disassociation is allowed to proceed. Such verification may take the form for a challenge sent to the requesting user device 130A. In some embodiments, such a challenge may require a response from the requesting user device 130A based on random or specific information to the requesting user device 130A.

FIG. 3A is a diagram illustrating exemplary exchanges that may occur in a system for providing dynamically generated SSIDs. Such exchanges may include a beacon 301 broadcast by an access point (e.g., access point 110A) and received by a wireless user device (e.g., user device 130A) or other wireless station. Such beacon 301 may advertise, for example, the presence of a secured wireless network supported by the access point. Unlike prior art beacons, however, such a beacon 301 does not advertise an SSID.

Where the station may wish to associate with the access point, the station may send a probe request 302 to the access point, which may return a probe response 303. Such probe response 303 likewise does not include an SSID. The station may follow up by sending an authentication request 304 with a pre-shared secret (and/or local nonce and challenge generated based on the pre-shared secret). The access point may then verify the challenge 305 and generate a corresponding local nonce, as well as an authentication session

key and SSID. The access point may then return an authentication response 306 with the nonce and challenge.

The station may then verify the challenge 307 and generate a corresponding authentication session key and SSID. Such SSID may be generated as discussed above with respect to steps 230-240. Such SSID may be sent in an association request 308 sent to the access point, which may then verify the SSID 309 and send an association response 310. Four-way WPA key negotiation (handshake) 311 may proceed using the session key as a pairwise master key. The session may then proceed until a deauthentication request is approved. Before any deauthentication request can be approved by the access point, however, the access point may seek to verify the request 312 based on a challenge sent to the station.

FIG. 3B is a diagram illustrating alternative exchanges that may occur in a system for providing dynamically generated SSIDs. Many of the steps are similar to those illustrated in FIG. 3A. The transmission of the authentication request 313 from the station to the access point, however, may include a pre-installed certification, which may contain a public key signed by a trusted authority. The access point may then verify the certification 314 and reply with an authentication response 315 with the generated SSID encrypted using the public key and pre-installed certification that includes the access point's public key signed by the same trusted authority. The station may then verify the certification 316 sent by the access point, and if successful, proceed with the remaining steps in a manner similar to those described with respect to FIG. 3A.

The present invention may be implemented in an application that may be operable using a variety of devices. Non-transitory computer-readable storage media refer to any medium or media that participate in providing instructions to a central processing unit (CPU) for execution. Such media can take many forms, including, but not limited to, non-volatile and volatile media such as optical or magnetic disks and dynamic memory, respectively. Common forms of non-transitory computer-readable media include, for example, a floppy disk, a flexible disk, a hard disk, magnetic tape, any other magnetic medium, a CD-ROM disk, digital video disk (DVD), any other optical medium, RAM, PROM, EPROM, a FLASHEPROM, and any other memory chip or cartridge.

Various forms of transmission media may be involved in carrying one or more sequences of one or more instructions to a CPU for execution. A bus carries the data to system RAM, from which a CPU retrieves and executes the instructions. The instructions received by system RAM can optionally be stored on a fixed disk either before or after execution by a CPU. Various forms of storage may likewise be implemented as well as the necessary network interfaces and network topologies to implement the same.

While various embodiments have been described above, it should be understood that they have been presented by way of example only, and not limitation. The descriptions are not intended to limit the scope of the invention to the particular forms set forth herein. Thus, the breadth and scope of a preferred embodiment should not be limited by any of the above-described exemplary embodiments. It should be understood that the above description is illustrative and not restrictive. To the contrary, the present descriptions are intended to cover such alternatives, modifications, and equivalents as may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims and otherwise appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art. The scope of the invention should, therefore, be determined not with reference to the above description, but instead should



be determined with reference to the appended claims along with their full scope of equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for dynamically generating service set identifiers, the method comprising:

broadcasting a plurality of beacons from an access point, wherein the beacons do not include any service set identifiers (SSIDs);

receiving a request sent wirelessly from a user device, the request concerning association with the access point;

executing instructions stored in memory, wherein execution of the instructions by a processor generates a unique SSID that is unique to the requesting user device, and wherein another user device uses a different SSID to associate with the access point, the different SSID being unique to the other user device;

receiving a subsequent association request from the requesting user device, the received subsequent association request concerning association with the access point as identified by the generated unique SSID;

associating the access point with the requesting user device based on a verification that the subsequent association request from the requesting user device includes the generated unique SSID that is unique to the requesting user device; and

receiving a deauthentication request relating to terminating the association between the user device and the access point, wherein the association between the user device and the access point is maintained until the deauthentication request is verified.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the SSID generated for the requesting user device is based on at least one of a MAC address of the requesting user device, random bits, a pre-shared secret, and vendor-specific information.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein generating the SSID further comprising performing a hash function on the at least one basis of the SSID.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising authenticating the requesting user device, wherein the requesting user device mutually authenticates the access point.

5. The method of claim 4, further comprising exchanging secret information between the access point and the requesting user device, wherein the mutual authentication is based on the exchanged secret information.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the unique SSID is specific to a current session.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein another unique SSID is dynamically generated for the requesting user device in a subsequent session.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the verification of the deauthentication request comprises sending a challenge to the requesting user device and verifying a challenge response from the requesting user device prior to deauthenticating the requesting user device.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the challenge is based on shared secret information between the access point and the requesting user device.

10. An apparatus for dynamically generating service set identifiers, the apparatus comprising:

an antenna that:

broadcasts a plurality of beacons from an access point, wherein the beacons do not include any service set identifiers (SSIDs), and

receives a request sent wirelessly from a user device, the request concerning association with the access point; and

a processor that executes instructions stored in memory, wherein execution of the instructions by the processor: generates a unique service SSID, wherein the generated SSID is unique to the requesting user device, and wherein another device uses a different SSID to associate with the access point, the different SSID being unique to the other user device,

receives subsequent association request from the requesting user device, the received subsequent association request concerning association with the access point as identified by the generated unique SSID, and

associates the access point with the requesting user device based on a verification that the subsequent association request from the requesting user device includes the generated unique SSID that is unique to the requesting user device,

wherein the antenna receives a deauthentication request relating to terminating the association between the user device and the access point, wherein the association between the user device and the access point is maintained until the deauthentication request is verified.

11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the SSID generated for the requesting user device is based on at least one of a MAC address of the requesting user device, random bits, a pre-shared secret, and vendor-specific information.

12. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the SSID is generated by performing a hash function on the at least one basis of the SSID.

13. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the requesting user device is authenticated by the access point prior to transmission of the unique SSID information, wherein the requesting user device mutually authenticates the access point.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein secret information is exchanged between the access point and the requesting user device, wherein the mutual authentication is based on the exchanged secret information.

15. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the unique SSID is specific to a current session.

16. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein another unique SSID is generated for the requesting user device in a subsequent session.

17. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the verification of the deauthentication request comprises sending a challenge to the requesting user device and verifying a challenge response from the requesting user device prior to deauthenticating the requesting user device.

18. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein the challenge is based on shared secret information between the access point and the requesting user device.

19. A non-transitory computer-readable storage medium, having embodied thereon a program executable by a processor to perform a method for dynamically generating service set identifiers, the method comprising:

broadcasting a plurality of beacons from an access point, wherein the beacons do not include any service set identifiers (SSIDs);

receiving a request sent wirelessly from a user device, the request concerning association with the access point; generating a unique SSID, wherein the generated SSID is unique to the requesting user device, and wherein another user device uses a different SSID to associate with the access point, the different SSID being unique to the other user device;

receiving a subsequent association request from the requesting user device, the received subsequent asso-

ciation request concerning association with the access  
point as identified by the generated unique SSID;  
associating the access point with the requesting user  
device based on a verification that the subsequent  
association request from the requesting user device 5  
includes the generated unique SSID that is unique to  
the requesting user device; and  
receiving a deauthentication request relating to terminat-  
ing the association between the user device and the  
access point, wherein the association between the user 10  
device and the access point is maintained until the  
deauthentication request is verified.

\* \* \* \* \*